

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report #31, May-June 1980

Focus on Mennonite Women and Depression

Depression which means a "down-in-the-dumps mood" is a normal feeling in every person's experience. In this issue we are focusing on depression as illness, when a person's sense of hopelessness and helplessness interferes with living. Women seem to be more vulnerable to depression; researchers tell us that two to five times as many women as men are diagnosed as depressed. As a pastor's wife I have been aware of the number of women (often with problems of depression) who seek counsel and help from their pastors in our Mennonite congregations.

The writers in this *Report* were asked to define the cultural reasons (if there are such) for depression among Mennonites. Other questions raised for them were: Do Mennonite women appreciate their sexuality and feminine uniqueness? How have the teachings of Scripture—authority and subjection, woman as subordinate—been a factor in depression? Do Mennonite

psychiatric hospitals differ in treatment from other treatment centers in styles of therapy and counseling? Does Christian faith help in overcoming depression?

One aspect this *Report* does not focus on is how the church can help members who are depressed. How can the church support and care for the person as well as the family in helpful ways? Perhaps the articles will assist the readers to understand depression so that they can authentically respond with love and care.

There are three feature writers. Ethel Yake Metzler has a private counseling practice in Elkhart and Goshen, Indiana. Walter Drudge is a therapist, consultant, and educator at Oaklawn Center, Elkhart, Indiana. The third writer is a woman who experiences chronic depression; she shares factors that created that depression.

—Anna Mary Brubacher, coordinator

A Close Look at Depression in Mennonite Women

Ethel Y. Metzler

To answer the questions below, posed by the Task Force on Women in Church and Society, I have talked with Mennonite women who would discuss their experiences with depression. I have drawn from my own clinical and personal experience with Mennonite clients, with depression, and from my being Mennonite.

These questions strike at core concerns of Mennonite women of all ages. We who are older have witnessed dramatic external behavioral shifts within the church. Those who are younger may not be aware of the less-repressed atmosphere among Mennonites as represented, for instance, in women's dress.

- Are there cultural reasons for depression among Mennonite women?
- Has improper teaching of Scripture and the conflicts this creates been a factor in depression?
- Have "high" expectations of women—drawn from "Christian" ideals of self-effacement and denied anger—been factors in depression of Mennonite women?
- Are there any uniquely Mennonite factors that cause depression? To all these questions, I must answer, "Most likely."

My discussions and work with Mennonite women suggest some relationship between their cultural and

religious milieu and their depression. As do other women, Mennonite women associate their experiences of depression with (1) inadequacy in changing their own and other family members' situations and feelings, (2) feeling trapped for reasons they seem powerless to change, (3) moves from one community, home, country, etc., to another, (4) puberty, conception, pre- and post-birthing (5) insignificance compared to males in the family re: job, position, power, involvement in the world outside the home, (6) stress of bearing some major responsibility such as finding a mate or rearing and managing a family, (7) not receiving adequate rewards for work or role, (8) misunderstanding of other family members around issues of stereotypical roles or tasks, personal money, family or personal needs, (9) withheld love and affection, (10) inadequate recognition of worth, (11) unacknowledged right to privacy, (12) relatively little intimacy, (13) trust deprivation. (The list ends at 13 only coincidentally! It could go on and on.)

I imagine that just as hysterectomy patients have double the number of post-operative admissions to psychiatric hospitals as do patients who have undergone other kinds of surgery, women whose repression has been sanctioned by the church suffer more depression associated with confusion as to self-worth, love, justice, equality; this is caused in part by patronizing cavalier attitudes toward their gender, assigned roles

and characteristics, and relative worth shown them under the authority of the church.

As a therapist I understand the survival value of depression. The act of depressing serves to keep thoughts and feelings from tearing the depressed person apart with rage, grief, and despair. Teilhard reminds us that love is the one power that can unite without submerging or destroying. As a therapist, I show love. In listening and respecting the validity of my client's experience, I acknowledge her self-worth; in choosing words that are meaningful to her, I let her know that her way of experiencing is understandable; in offering strategies for effective change, I encourage her to trust her self-determining instincts; in utilizing processes of relating that express trust, I entice her to experiment with self-trust; in assisting her to express and feel her emotions, I expand her freedom to allow herself to be an integrated person; in utilizing interventions that release aspirations, I challenge her to substitute hope for fear.

Additionally, therapy with depressed women includes teaching them to challenge their inadequate, self-demeaning belief systems. An example of this is the confusion between not wanting to hurt others and nonassertiveness toward valuing their wants, wishes, and feelings. Therapy also includes reality testing for many depressed women bend every effort to excel—if not in reality, at least in their imaginations. This is an attempt to reduce the anxiety and feelings associated with their own loss in being less or more than human. Therapy includes developing communication skills, based on heightened awareness of body, emotion, and mind, for depression cuts out cognizance, alertness, joy, and the ability to disclose appropriately.

Whether you name it a pit or a pedestal, as does the editor of selected writings in the history of American feminism, *Up from the Pedestal*, the place of women in my lifetime has been unequal to men. Many Mennonite women have been slow to look at the social components, the economic and political dimensions, and the psychological dynamics of their depressions. But many have experienced the profound loss and resulting depression brought about by their close association with a church whose oppressive values have been taught under the rubric of Christ's doctrine. As a therapist, I seek to assist women to separate out and claim the meanings and means of faith that sustain them. I seek to assist them to realign their energies toward being taken seriously in the church. I encourage them to study, explore, theologize, so that they may come to discover for themselves what truths they want to live by. Fortunately, a growing number of women and men are willing to join in that search with new awareness.

Other learnings can inhibit the depressive syndrome as a preferred means of facing loss. Learning to critique themselves, instead of despising themselves following criticism or imagined criticism; learning not to be polarized either by being perfect or by depreciating themselves; learning to accept their shortcomings, limitations, abilities, interests, gifts, and desires as

God-known; learning to enjoy differences; learning to ask instead of expect, to disclose instead of manipulate, to choose genuine loving contact—even if it involves conflict—instead of avoidance, hiding, trivializing; learning to feel their feelings and create safe means for expressing them.

Rage, grief, and despair are warring, wearing, draining emotions. When their source lies deep within the personal history and memory bank of the depressed individual, she needs empathy, acceptance, and assistance. Gestalt techniques, liberation theology, feminist psychology, or transformational interventions may all be potent tools to unlock the door to the shut-out pain of past losses.

I utilize methods that Ruth Carter Stapleton (in *The Gift of Inner Healing*) describes: putting into practice the understanding that God is omniscient and omnipresent. Through faith-imagination she assists the client to imagine Jesus interacting in the situations which created loss and where appropriate emotions were blocked off, were experienced alone, or became connected with parts of the body, certain environments, times, objects, or persons. Other transformational strategies may lead the individual toward self-affirmation, alignment with higher thoughts, experiencing forgiveness of self and others, as well as toward filling up the vacuum of losses to person- and selfhood somehow denied her.

My basic belief assumes that persons desiring wholeness are experiencing problems often initiated by lack of love and understanding from others rather than by sins they have committed. For women, some losses are sustained just by the fact of their gender. The same is true for men. We can work together, as did the woman in the following example, to heal with the illuminating, uniting love of Christ.

A minister's wife lived with a mild depression many years. As she began to recount her experience, she discovered it was associated with her husband's rigid, rule-regulated, temper-energized disciplining of their children. She had found comfort in biblical passages that gave sanction to his behavior and her compliance with his being head of the house. But as you might suspect, her heart told her something was very wrong. When she found to her dismay that her children were "lost to the church" and the ego satisfaction that her husband had enjoyed as his children had performed obediently for his congregation was lost, she became extremely depressed. In therapy she chose to go individually to each of her children and cry the tears she had denied experiencing when they had been punished. It meant finally confronting her husband. It meant sorting out with him and helping him acknowledge his responsibility for his unloving, unChrist-informed, rationalized behavior. It meant finally challenging him to seek forgiveness from his children and his church.

Other persons choose other ways to deal with depressions around similar problems. Each person, each woman, finds choices suitable to herself, thus learning to interact fully with her emotions, beliefs, intentions,

perceptions, and the persons close to her. She comes to affirm the statement, "The richness of life is the discovery of one's own experience."

Acknowledging the commonality of experiencing loss, we become more fully human and participate in universal loss. Pushing the personal pain of depression

to the existential level of suffering, we find one poignant, uniting common denominator of the human condition, which Christ seeks to experience with us.

We can work together to heal with the illuminating, uniting love of Christ. —Ethel Y. Metzler

An Interview with Walter Drudge about Depression

Recorded by Ethel Y. Metzler

Depression, Dr. Drudge began, is associated with unresolved loss and attendant lack of coming to grips with the emotions associated with the loss. There are four main categories of depression utilized in diagnosis and subsequently as guides in treatment.

I

The first is depressive personality syndrome, which typically results from profound loss during childhood of a primary parental figure. The first five to ten years of life (in some cases beyond that) are viewed as a prime formative period in development of body, mind, and emotional well-being. This profound parental loss may be compounded when the live person who should be available, is not as available as the individual needs and wants. Whether the reasons for this distance clustered around the responsible caregiver's own grief, personality, or circumstances, the net result to the child is the same: the inability to reach the desired source of affection and attachment. The resulting emotions are anger, sadness, with predispositions to apathy and/or violence.

Dr. Drudge's observation is that, until recently, the last emotion dealt with among Mennonites was anger. There seemed to be an excessive acculturated repression of strong negative feelings, particularly to losses seen as "God's will" or "under God's blessing." The normal, natural, angry feelings were pushed under, with little permission given the child to experience the full gamut of emotions associated with grief: anger, resentment, hostility, self-pity, bereavement, lostness, sorrow, guilt, and alienation from themselves.

II

Reactive depression is the second category, Dr. Drudge explained. Experienced at any age, this involves obligation to adapt without compensation for the sustained loss. Typically, there is denial of rebellion, anger, jealousy. The deprivation is often experienced over and against another's obvious gain. Without substantial gain themselves, and no open way for dealing with their emotions, these persons turn their feelings inward and try to battle it through. The resultant external/internal state is depression.

The loss may be associated with not finding a vocation or mate, a move from one setting to another, a reduction of salary, loss of status or position. Adjustment is the expected attitudinal stance. Against this expected alignment, the individual feels rebellion, lowered self-worth, precariousness, vulnerability, alienation, weakness, and sadness. Faced with this

mini-death, a pall of depression spreads across the individual's experience of the loss.

Since for women who are married and who are also parents the need to care for their children seems to involve caring for their husbands as well, these women are prone to sustain multiple, successive personal griefs as their husbands pursue professional, vocational, church, and personal goals. The result may be serial reactive depressions.

Dr. Drudge described his own coming to terms (while in graduate school) with the observation that women possessed qualities that matched those of men, knowing that his wife's intellect matched his beyond a shadow of a doubt. He decided that it would be sick for him to perpetuate in any way the inequity women typically experienced in society. He and his wife would work toward relationship goals which fostered personal goals for each, which were not gained at the unwilling expense of the other. In marriage, he noted, each partner needs to make changes. Then neither needs to make all the change. Each needs to give approval to the other's plans so that one does not need to do all the adaptation. Where there is equality, both gain; neither is diminished.

In most marriages, he has observed, the partners discover that one or the other feels limited, diminished, thwarted. When partners choose to enhance the experience of growth for the other, boredom is lifted from marriage. Enthusiasm for life returns, the relationship finds meaning in its contribution to each. Although, typically, women come in for therapy because of their experience of inequality, they show greater maturity than men and often will take the lead in bridging from a state of dependence/independence to one of mutual interdependence.

III

The third category of depression is ambivalence about losing an imprisoning role. Whether women want to acknowledge it or not, clinicians have noted the mixture of anxiety and fear which women exhibit when faced with the possibility of encountering a new terrain.

The depression often finds expression in bodily aches and pains. These somatic equivalents of depression are legitimate topics of conversation, acceptable handles for gaining attention from friends as well as doctors and family. When women present aches and pains in the clinical setting such as back and abdominal hurts or distress, the clinician looks at the emotionality, after ruling out disease. Because of the inter-

twining of emotional and physical variables, Dr. Drudge prefers to work in a wholistic health setting, where medical, religious, and mental health practitioners may confer and refer as necessary.

IV

A fourth type of depression is associated with middle age, the mid-life depression. For women this is often associated with physiological changes or menopause. Culturally it is expected that depression is more than likely to occur to some degree in both men and women in the middle years as the empty nest underscores the loss of significant persons, the onset of the later years, imminent retirement, and potential loneliness far greater than may meet the eye. Because Mennonite women are more likely to retreat than to aggress under stress, their natural tendency is to go back to an accustomed style of handling stress more typical of earlier years. The adaptation may express itself in varying degrees of disengagement from people and from tasks, from responsibilities related to self as well as to family and society.

V

Depression, although dismal, has in it the germ of reconstruction, asserts Dr. Drudge. It can be viewed as a time for reordering, reviewing, consolidating. In and of oneself this is too much to deal with alone. If someone can be reached who the depressed person can relate to, there is hope that the person will come to discover the worthwhileness of living.

In the treatment of depression, Dr. Drudge described himself as tuning in to the limited range of the client's emotions so that he can introduce fairly early, by his own behavior, that here is a whole range of emotionality and this is acceptable. The important thing is to deal constructively with the multiplicity of emotions common to human experience.

Dr. Drudge said that he hopes to be perceived as easy to relate to and available for whatever emotions the person might have, no matter what mixture of hurts, anger, woundedness. He does this by showing sufficient interest in the reconstruction of the details around the experiences of loss. Repeatedly he returns to pick up the thread and to allow the client to experience the pain.

The professional structure of one hour a week, Dr. Drudge affirmed, allows the therapist to help the client dip in deeply, then take a recess. This weekly movement toward and then away from the area of pain, demonstrates a model for problem-solving in general, where to take a problem as far as you can take it, then drop it to come back and pick it up and renew the process is extremely healthy as it conserves energy and respects the intrinsic methodology of our minds, bodies, and emotions.

The depressed person has learned methods and skills in depressing, suppressing, postponing, and peripheralizing as means of denying irritations, frustrations, annoyances. Observed fatigue has resulted from damming up the emotionality underlying the depres-

sion. Intimidation by authority, males, religion, self-negation—all these produce anger that the depressed individual believes must at all costs be obscured. Through interaction with the therapist, the depressed client may learn to identify to what extent she has felt supported by the therapist. Utilizing the therapist-client relationship as a laboratory for learning to deal with feelings, Dr. Drudge nudges the clients toward accepting the importance of becoming her own person. This means allowing anger, supporting assertion, practicing responding in her own way unhurriedly.

Dr. Drudge noted that some Mennonite women seem to have thought about the idea of self-concept; others are surprised at the idea of a portrait of self. He knows that developing freedom to be one's own person requires time, but eventually women begin to pick up on the idea and come back to it.

One common experience of Mennonite women is the development of an excessively punitive conscience which overevaluates through polar opposites: right, wrong; win, lose; good, bad, etc. Many Mennonite women do not seem to have a range of options from which to choose. As a therapist, Dr. Drudge seeks to lend an ancillary conscience from which the client can take courage to revise the indoctrinated conscience which has been socially inherited. The inherited conscience may in a large part be realistic and healthy, but in some aspects excessively critical. The person experiences this as though the punishing, critical parents were present, crippling their efforts to develop their own values and conscience.

Dr. Drudge has noticed that Mennonite women often have intellectual capability beyond what their present situations seem to utilize. In grade school and high school, the Mennonite girl gets a glimpse of personal potential, only to have to deny it in compliance with religious values and role expectations. The price paid is diminished self-esteem. Adaptation may lead to degrees of withdrawal from children, psycho-physiological difficulties, food addictions. When life feels heavy, the woman may become heavy, age prematurely, lack excitement about marriage, mothering, sexual relations. There may be no definable disease or pathology. Absence of aliveness, exuberance, and zest for life characterizes depression.

Dr. Drudge says he is seldom angry with Mennonite women and feels compassion for their efforts to break out of roles and find their potential. He is impressed by the examples of women such as Florence Friesen and Ella Garber Bauman whose clear goals helped them past all the obstacles of a male-dominated society to become medical doctors several decades ago and practice in India.

In the past, Dr. Drudge noted, society typically held that growth develops during the first 18-20 years and after that one is stuck with a set of traits. A hopeful note among clinicians is the beginning emphasis on transformational energy. *Transformation, Growth and Change in Adult Life*, a book by Roger Gould, M.D., notes the new views of growth that are spilling over from biology into psychology. While patterns of behav-

ior may be difficult to change as we grow older, they can give way to heightened views of self, relationship possibilities, and the world of people, ideas, and things. Therapists as well as clients need not hide behind the age factor any more. Age in and of itself is not a deterrent to change.

Conclusion

The rewards of changing draw persons to the exciting adventure of interacting with themselves. Just as people who may not be tuned into the world of nature may learn to do so, persons may learn to tune into themselves. They can learn to enjoy the photos of

themselves that before they might have thrown out! They can learn to accept their thoughts, fantasies, fears, experiences, bodily expressions. Claiming these, they may then make choices in new directions. Acceptance of the self is difficult when within one's experience there has been one or two important persons who have not been accepting or affirming, or who have been lost. All through life a growing person may have to deal with constant processing of why the feeling of self-acceptance doesn't seem to fit. With courage, loaned at times from the therapist or others, an individual may gain genuine open affirmation of herself even in the face of early traumatic losses of significant others.

My Mennonite Depression

By a woman who wishes to remain anonymous

I was born into a family of six children whose parents were typically rural, hard-working Mennonites on a farm in Ohio. I was the only girl, preceded by two brothers and followed by three. I perceived my childhood as normally pleasant as I grew up. My dad was quietly authoritative and strong with a deep commitment to the work ethic. He was thrifty and frugal. Mother, too, was gifted with a healthy body and mind, and appeared silently accepting of her role as wife and mother—with full submission to Dad's expectations.

My home was silently pious where there was no training in, or room for, expression or aggression or negative feelings. I hardly knew that it was possible or permissible to express feelings, good or bad. There seemed to be a built-in prohibition of anger and joy. I look back with sadness when I realize how much our feelings were suppressed; little room for self-expression and creativity existed. I can now see that because I had been programmed to wipe out my feelings, depression became the only way to stop feeling. Silent communication was interpreted as negative rather than positive.

Not only were feelings suppressed, there was no modeling and expression of love and affection between Mother and Dad, nor between them and we children. Verbal expressions of love and acceptance were absent. And so it became apparent to me that I needed to perform for my acceptance. It became my primary goal to do the "right" things. Even though no one defined these for me, I decided it meant getting good grades, excelling to reach the top—to some level of perfection. To do this I needed to be nice, proper, right, good, obedient, and have lots of friends—ultimately to do everything everyone expected me to.

The church reinforced my "achievement for acceptance" concept. There was a lack of control of one's own destiny by being pushed into the mold already created by church fathers. Fear and guilt were the forces used to scare me into the church. I had a dogged determination to be a spiritual giant by performing the "shoulds" and "oughts," seeking God's will and favor. There was something despicable about admitting weakness or

anything less than victorious happy Christian life. As I reflect on this now, I think a healthy religion should not only create guilt, but provide a way to deal with it.

The traditional male/female role among Mennonites made its impression upon my life. There was no crossing the line in my home. Dad and the boys took care of the farm chores while Mother and I performed the household work. I did take on somewhat of a "tomboy" image as it did seem acceptable for me to play ball, ride the hay wagon, and climb trees with my brothers. A concept of my unique "femaleness" was left for me to discover alone—consequently I formed a warped image of sexuality. I failed to perceive my femininity as a beautiful gift which could develop into womanhood. I was ill-prepared to fill the role of wife and mother.

Decisions along the way were made for me, and I fell into them just as expected. My slavery to the church's expectations allowed for little chance of a good self-image to develop and be nurtured. I lacked self esteem and a sense of self worth. Too much attention on self was defined as pride, and pride was sin. Humility was a virtue—to be nice and thoughtful and kind to everyone else but self. It was like wearing a cheery "smile" button that hid a great deal of human pain—like an unconscious need to repress and deny what was perceived as unacceptable feelings. It was a long hard road to making the discovery that experiencing pleasure and fun—purely for my own self—was indeed okay, acceptable, and necessary. (1 May 1980)

Quotable

A tremendous sense of liberation and joy is evidenced in the lines of those men who have experienced and continue to experience redefinitions of their own use of power, for they are now able to deal with women as people (and hence as fellow-creatures designed to honor the Creator) instead of as objects.—Susan G. Higgins, "Comments on: Women and Men: Colleagues in Mission," *Gospel in Context*, April 1979, page 19.

Selected Bibliography

Books:

Bailey, Barry, *Living with Your Feelings*. Abingdon, 1980. Six brief chapters: "Building on Failure," "Anger," "Anxiety," "Depression," "Guilt," "Free to Be Human."

De Rosis, Helen, M.D., and Pellegrino, Victoria Y., *The Book of Hope: How Women Can Overcome Depression*, New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1976. A self-help book for laymen.

Flack, Frederic F., M.D., *The Secret Strength of Depression*, New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1974. Easily read book of important factors in depression.

Ostow, Mortimer, M.D., *The Psychology of Melancholy*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970. An introduction to theories of depression and procedures of therapists in treating depressive illness.

Smith, Nancy, *Winter Past*. IVP, 1977.

Sturgeon, Wina, *Depression: How to Recognize It, How to Cure It, and How to Grow From It*, Englewood Cliffs, N. Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1979. Popular treatment of subject with some good insights into living with a depressed person based on personal experience as well as research.

Trobisch, Walter, *Love Yourself*. IVP, 1976. Deals with self acceptance and depression.

Magazines:

Scarf, Maggie, "The More Sorrowful Sex", *Psychology Today* Vol. 12, April 1979, pp. 36-38. (Additional

articles in same edition on other aspects of depression.

Crockett, Margaret Williams, "Depression In Middle-Aged Women", *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, Vol. 31, March 1977, pp. 47-55.

Wiebe, Vernon (interview), "Depression", *The Mennonite*, June 20, 1978. (Same article appeared in *The Christian Leader* August 1, 1978)

Films:

"Feelings of Depression" (black & white) 30 min. Mental Mechanical series of National Film Board. A case history of a man in depression. Traces the genetic development of a neurotic depression by examining the emotional significance of a series of his experiences.

"The Admittance" 43 min. National Film Board production. Recounts the reactions in a family when one of two sisters becomes mentally ill. A study of how latent depression manifests itself.

Both films are available in Canada from National film Board, International Distribution, P.O. Box 6100, Montreal, Quebec, H3C 3H5.

You are invited to let your name stand on a resource listing of women

Women in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches today have a wide variety of skills and resources that could be used more widely with the context of the church. Mennonite women are seminary graduates, are serving in pastoral roles, have had significant overseas or domestic service experience, and are experienced as seminar leaders and retreat speakers, for example.

The boards of Mennonite church agencies, conference and seminar planning committees and other church groups or bodies often don't include women as members or participants simply because they are not aware of eligible, qualified women to fill these roles.

The MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women promotes broader inclusion of women at decision-making levels, as resource persons and in other dimensions of

church life and institutional activities. We are compiling a list of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women who have such resources to offer, especially in the areas of theology, religious life and women's issues. If you would like to be included on the listing or know of someone who should, please complete this form and mail it to: *Women's Task Force Resource Listing, MCC Peace Section, Akron, PA 17501.*

Name:

Address:

Church denomination:

Area(s) in which I am willing to serve as a resource:

My current occupation(s) is:

My educational background is:

My experience includes:

Please attach additional sheets as necessary.

Pushing the personal pain of depression to the existential level of suffering, we find one poignant, uniting common denominator of the human condition, which Christ seeks to experience with us. —Ethel Y. Metzler

What is the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society?

Structure of Task Force: The MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society was formed in 1973. In 1975 it became binational when Canadians were appointed to the Task Force. The Task Force reports to the Peace Section at its annual meeting. At present there are six members on the Task Force—three Americans and three Canadians, who each serve one three-year period. The attempt is made to seek the widest possible representation from MCC constituent groups. There are no re-elections or reappointments. Appointments to serve on the Task Force are made by the Canadian Peace and Social Concerns Committee and the Peace Section (U.S.). The Task Force meets twice a year. The Task Force has structured itself so that leadership, decision-making and responsibilities are shared by the members.

Philosophy: The teachings of Christ show no discrimination between men and women. The overriding objective is to facilitate the creation of a more whole, inclusive church and to have each person's contribution to the church fully recognized. The work of the Task

Force reflects Peace Section's commitment to justice for all persons.

Goals: 1) To foster an awareness of problems and issues related to the status of women in church and society by: a) disseminating information; b) promoting research of policies, practices and attitudes that may discriminate against women in areas of employment, education, representation on boards and committees and leadership positions; c) engaging in educational programs.

2) To provide a forum for the sharing of concerns, ideas and resource materials relating to women's issues.

3) To urge church organizations to involve women in all dimensions of church life and establish guidelines to ensure full participation.

4) To assist and support groups that are trying to increase the involvement of women in their programs.

News and Verbs

Circle 27-29 March 1981 on your calendar. Another *Women in Ministry* conference will take place, this one at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. With a large selection of workshops, this conference will go beyond consciousness-raising.

Research papers based on the 1978 conference, "Issues in Federal Statistical Needs Relating to Women," are available for \$4.75 (152 pp.) from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

More women than men (50.7%) are enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Two-year colleges show the greatest enrollment increases for women.

Linda Hiebert was part of a four-person Friendship-delegation that visited Indochina early this year. She works for the Center for International Policy, American Friends Service Committee, and Mennonite Central Committee.

Barbara Enholm-Narzynska, executive secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Poland, was principal speaker at the 164th annual meeting of the American Bible Society in May.

In December 1977, a group of four women and their fourteen children in La Paz, Bolivia, confronted their nation by starting a hunger strike—the weapon of the

weak. They wanted to change the course of their nation's history, and to an extent they did. They were demanding a general and unrestricted amnesty to all political prisoners and exiles, and that military units be removed from the mining areas where they lived. By 16 January 1978 more than 1,200 persons in Bolivia had joined them in their hunger strike. Although government police attacked three of the striking groups, the strike did end on January 18 as the Bolivian government said it would respond to the demands of the four women—and the people of Bolivia who had joined them. In June 1979 an election was held, and a civilian chosen to provisionally head the government, which for three months made tentative steps toward democracy. Then it was toppled by a bloody military coup. Worker-led resistance led 16 days later to the replacement of the military leadership by a congressionally selected president—a woman. Lydia Gueiler Tejada is the first woman to head a Latin American country in her own right, and will run the country (with the military still strongly in the background) until elections are held this summer. These are hard times in Bolivia, and the hunger of the women and people of Bolivia will not result from strikes but from economic events. Inflation exceeds 20% annually, and the price of fuel and basic foods is about to skyrocket with the removal of subsidies. For further information, contact MCC Peace Section Washington Office, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

—Betsy Beyler

Twelve weeks after issue, 800 copies of the 1,500 printed of *Which Way Women?* had been sold. A

reprinting is considered. Edited by *Dorothy Yoder Nyce*, this project of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society is a collection of 55 writings in three categories: equality, development, and peace. A bargain at \$3.00 (Canada, \$3.50). Order, with payment, from Peace Section, MCC, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501.

Susan Flickinger, Bethel College student, has been named by U.S. Peace Section to a joint committee with MCC U.S. to plan for alternate service program under MCC sponsorship and pursue discussions with government officials regarding provisions for conscientious objectors.—*MCC News Service*

Dorothy Irvin, archaeology professor at College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, says that a collection of photographs she has taken of ancient mosaics, frescoes, and inscriptions show there were female priests and bishops in the early Christian church. "Although it is not perfectly clear what constituted ordination at different times and places in the early centuries of the church, the archaeological evidence shows women as receiving ordination and exercising ministry on a par with men," she says. (AP release, *Lincoln [NE] Journal and Star*, 2 April 1980.)

Three women are on the Mennonite World Conference Council: *Winifred Beechy*, *Gladys Goering*, and *Jo van Ingen Schenau-Elsen*. Planning sessions for the 1980 gathering are scheduled for Osaka, Japan, in June 1980, and Nairobi, Kenya, in 1981. Your concerns can be addressed to Winifred (Box 1245, Elkhart, IN 46515) and Gladys (205 S. Washington, Moundridge, KS 67107). Jo lives at Wilhelminapark 33, 2343 AE Oegstgeest, Netherlands.

Matilda Voth, Newton, Kansas, has published the record of her experiences in (often pioneering) mission work for the General Conference Mennonite Church in a 355-page book entitled *Clear Shining After Rain*.

Lois Kreider, who has been at the beginnings of several MCC thrift shops ("Et Cetera" in some places) was featured speaker for 148 representatives from 66 Canadian and U.S. thrift and self-help stores, gathering in Akron, Pennsylvania, last spring.

The next meeting of the Task Force on Women in Church and Society will be in Chicago on 20 November 1980. New members attending will be *Martha Smith*

Good of New Hamburg, Ontario, and *Bertha Beachy*, Salunga, Pennsylvania. Continuing members are *Rosie Epp* of Wichita, Kansas, *Mary Dueck* of Fresno, California, *Edith Krause* of Vancouver, B.C., *Elsa Redekopp* of Winnipeg, Manitoba. *Anny Mary Brubacher* of Kitchener, Ontario will continue for one more year in an advisory capacity.

Lois Bergen, General Conference Mennonite Director of Youth Work, was one of six resource persons at a Christian Peacemaker Registration and Draft Information Day at Hesston College in March.

Elsie Miller of Oak Grove Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio, was licensed by that congregation for the position of associate pastor on 17 February 1980. She and *Meg Reicher* were subsequently chosen by the Central District Conference to serve on the four-member ministerial committee.

The Mennonite Brethren convened a study conference in British Columbia on 8-10 May 1980. Included was a study of "Women in the Church" by David Ewert, faculty member at M. B. Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. One of the respondents was *Karen Neufeld*, faculty member at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas.

Women 1980 is a newly-begun newsletter by the United Nations Division for Economic and Social Information. Requests to get on the mailing list should be sent to Room A-555, United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Lillian Toews, Morris, Manitoba, has earned membership in the Guild of American Luthiers (stringed instrument makers). Her first effort, a full-size instrument taking six months to complete, has been valued at \$1000.—*Mennonite Weekly Review*, 7 Jan. 1980.

Reformed Judaism has sent a twenty-question form to its 750 congregations to raise consciousness about women's roles. "Religious attitudes tend to sanctify custom," said a spokesperson.

The MCC Brazil unit continues to support the international boycott of Nestle Company, informing the company and other interested agencies of its intentions. The resolution grew out of an awareness of the Nestle relationship to local health professionals and Nestle's apparent promotional activities through them to the mothers of newborn babies, who came to rely on

"Be filled with the Spirit...and be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Ephesians 5: 18-21). Apparently the willingness to participate in relationships of mutual submission is natural to lives that are filled with the Holy Spirit. Can we say that a lack of such willingness is a sign of the absence of the Spirit?"—S. Scott Bartchy, "Comments on Women and Men: Colleagues in Mission," *Gospel in Context*, April 1979, p. 16.

the company's commercial formula instead of nursing their infants.

Helen Rose Tieszen, Mennonite-United Methodist missionary in Seoul, Korea, is translating poems by Korean children into English. Some have been published in Vol. 53 of *Transactions* of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch. Reported by Elaine Sommers Rich in her column "Thinking with...."

Dorothy Gish, professor at Messiah College, addressed 74 staff members of Mennonite Central Committee offices at an all-day retreat in April: "You are highly valued by God. Nothing you do can make God love you more or less. We represent God's handiwork in creation; each is a deliberate, divine design."

—*Mennonite Weekly Review*

Bertha Beachy, new member of the MCC Task Force on Women and Society, will attend the Evangelical Women's Caucus, June 25-28, in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., on behalf of the task force. The theme is "Women and the Ministry of Reconciliation."

Sue Stephan, Mennonite Central Committee (U.S.) volunteer from Longmeadow, Massachusetts, is administrative assistant with Evangelicals for Social Action in Philadelphia.

Barbara Wyler, spokesperson for the Alliance for Survival, said (March 1980), "Our goal was to stop the arms bazaar in Anaheim (California). But we found out from the conference firm that organizes these military shows that they have cancelled all future military exhibitions in the United States." However Weisbaden (Germany) will be the site of the next such military exhibition, 7-9 October 1980.—*Catholic Agitator*, 2 April 1980

Elizabeth Shantz was elected treasurer of Mennonite Mental Health Services board of directors at their March meeting in St. Louis.

Diane L. MacDonald, assistant professor of religion at Goshen College, will be the C. Henry Smith Peace Lecturer at Goshen and Bluffton colleges in 1980-81, formulating an "Anabaptist peace theology of female-male relationships aided by liberation and process theologies."

Elizabeth and Perry Yoder are workshop leaders on "Men and Masculinity in the Kingdom of God" at the 25-28 June 1980 (fourth annual) conference of Evangelical Women's Caucus, this one entitled "Women and the Ministry of Reconciliation."

Gertrude Roten, professor of Greek at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, is teaching an intensive three-week study of First John in Japan this

summer. It is sponsored by the Taiwan Mennonite Church, the Japan Anabaptist Center (where classes are held), and the Japan Mennonites. The General Conference Commission on Overseas Mission is assisting with funds.

"I was there, too," said *Katherine Loewen* from the back of the room where the founding father of Tabor College were being celebrated last August. The occasion prompted *Rebekah Burch Basinger* to "wonder about all the other women who 'had been there, too,'" and feature some founding mothers in the Fall 1979 Tabor College Bulletin, *Perspectives*, which she edits.

Helen E. Falls, professor of missions, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was the Theological Center Guest, April 14-18, at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries. These guests speak in chapel, classes, and are available for dialogue and counsel. *Mary Anne Boschman* of Vancouver, B.C., and her husband *Paul*, were such guests at the seminaries earlier in the year.

Joyce M. Shutt, was ordained to the ministry of Fairfield (Pa.) Mennonite Church on 18 May 1980. *Joyce* grew up in this congregation and has spent most of her life in it. A year ago it requested that she be licensed as a minister.

How do we as women experience militarism and what is our nonviolent feminist response? This is the focus of a 25 July-1 August 1980 conference in southwest Scotland, planned by women of the War Resister's League and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Inquiries can be made to Bernadette Ridard, Methfesselstrasse 69, 2 Hamburg 19, West Germany.

Wilma Bailey, 1979 graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, was licensed to the ministry at Grace Chapel, Saginaw, Michigan, as associate minister with John Paul Wenger. A service of soul and traditional music and testimony and prayer preceded the licensing service. In the afternoon a special reception was held for Wilma by the congregation, followed by a Black Women Leadership Awareness program.

"Bella Center" in Copenhagen, Denmark, is the location of a World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace. The dates: 14-30 July 1980. A preparatory committee for the conference is composed of representatives from 23 countries. Address inquiries to the Secretariat of World Conference of UN Decade for Women, Room A-555, United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Herta Funk has compiled a nine-page bibliography on women's concerns. Write her at Box 347, Newton, KS 67114.

Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women who are

available as resource persons in a variety of settings have submitted their names for a Resource Listing compiled by *Linda Schmidt*. Here are ideas for guest lecturers, chapel or convocation speakers, class resource persons, or consultants. Free copies can be had from MCC Peace Section, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501. (See page 6 of this *Report*.)

Women of Gorleben, West Germany, are opposing nuclear installation. They organized April meetings in villages around Gorleben and a mass rally at the proposed site of an installation. Contact person is Ilona Wagner, Gr. Lessen 122, 2838 Sullingen 2, West Germany.

Melva Mueller, executive director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, said in Washington, D.C., in February: "Women's struggle for equal rights is also the struggle against war. Forced training for killing is not a legitimate 'right' for women or men, and equality in death is the antithesis of

human rights. Feminist and peace groups have been stating their rejection of the war trend, beginning with registration, yet we are always asked whether we support equality in the armed forces. This is like asking if you've stopped beating your wife. We reject the question."

Anne Dueck, a Mennonite Disaster Service organizer during the Red River flood in Southern Manitoba, was featured speaker at the MDS All-Unit Meeting in Saskatoon, 8-9 February 1980. "If you're tired of your lot in life," she said, "build a service station on it... Women can help with food, but there are lots of other things they can do.... And there's a real need for women with basic counseling skills to help people in shock after a disaster."

When you come across news and verbs that you would like to share with the 1,100 readers of this *Report*, send them to me at 4830 Woodland Ave., Lincoln, NE 68516.

—*Muriel Thiessen Stackley, Editor*

Reviews

Direction, quarterly publication of Mennonite Brethren schools, for January 1980 has feature articles on "Women in the Work of the Church." Writers and their subjects are: Jean Janzen, "The Church Can Help Women Choose"; Esther Wiens, "When Men and Women Work Together in the Church"; Linda Gerbrandt, "My Experience as a Member of the Faith and Life Commission"; Sandra Plett, "Attitudes Toward Women as Reflected in Mennonite Brethren Periodicals" (comprehensive and captivating); John E. Toews, "The Role of Women in the Church: The Pauline Perspective"; Rebekah Burch Basinger, "What Books Say: A Bibliographic Essay." Information about subscriptions (\$5.00 per year) or extra copies can be had from Allen Guenther, 77 Henderson, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2L 1L1. —*mts*

Let My People Grow, by *Michael Harper* (*Logos International*, 1977) is reviewed by *Paul I. Dyck*, Route 2, Bluffton, Ohio 45817. Paul is a former missionary to India.

Harper has a delightful chapter devoted to the question of women in leadership positions. The book is worth its price for this chapter alone. His conclusion is that while Jesus did not appoint a woman to the circle of 12—which would have been unthinkable in an era of strong male domination—he did have many female followers. He took them into his confidence. He spoke with women in public, to the great embarrassment of his peers. Jesus began the process of liberating women from male domination.

Paul is not nearly as male dominant as his statement "women should keep silent in church" would indicate. Paul argues vigorously for the equality of the sexes: "In Christ there is neither male nor female." He commends

Phoebe, Priscilla, and Lydia, who were leaders and teachers in the early church. He names other women in his letters who were his "fellow workers." Harper is amazed that after such a noble beginning women again slipped into second-class status for 2,000 years, and now it is secular society—rather than the church—leading the way in recognizing that men and women ought to be partners in joint endeavors. Women, he says, lend a very desirable dimension to the leadership teams and should not be excluded on the basis of sex. It is the Lord who gives leadership—who are we to deny them? —*The Mennonite*, 11 March 1980

Recognizing the "Invisible" Woman in Development: The World Bank Experience, *Gloria Scott, ed.*, 1979. The reviewer is *Diana Nyangira*, interviewer for the Nebraska job service office in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Invisible women in developing nations include: those in some areas use 50% of their energy carrying water for the day's needs; Senegalese women who spend four hours per day grinding the ten or so pounds of wheat needed to prepare their families' food; women who through traditional patterns of eating are apportioned food last (men first, boys, girls, and then women), meaning that when food is scarce, women go hungry.

The classroom in developing nations is a place where females are less likely to be visible than are males. Reasons are both economic and cultural. The report states that in Pakistan, for example, 40% of the boys and 15% of the girls complete grade school. Women's disproportionate lack of education impacts on their productivity, family health, and on the nation's economy.

The report states that the World Bank is trying to be more aware of how its development projects affect

women; it is hoping to assure that they—generally the poorest segment of a poor society—will benefit from its efforts.

Copies of the report can be obtained from World Bank, 1818 H Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20433. JI will send my copy to the first person requesting it.—mts

"The Role of Women in Missions" by Patricia J. Mortenson in *Gospel in Context*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 1979, pp. 28-31. Respondents are Ralph and Fern Ewert, a doctor-nurse couple from Lincoln, Nebraska, who spent ten years in Zaire.

A summary statement of the article might be: "However we define the role of women in mission, it must be based on the great doctrines or transactions of Scripture between God and people and not on cultural patterns or isolated proof texts. There are numerous reciprocal commands in Scripture such as "love one another," "receive one another," "admonish one another." These are not one-directional down a hierarchal line. These are commands to those who stand on the level ground at the foot of the cross within the two-way flow of true communion" (pp. 29, 30).

Says Ralph: "A good article. Not very specific. More men need to speak up for women. Williamson in *We Have No Rights* hits all Christians, both men and women, but men prefer to just apply it to women. I am convinced that men in Christian leadership positions are generally quite far from understanding what Christ was talking about in John 13:12-17. We men would prefer to keep women in the servant role."

Says Fern: "I feel the article is worth reading. Mortenson makes valid points. However, I had a gut reaction that some women may misconstrue and be "too liberated." To explain, I agree that women's roles are too often boxed, and I believe talents and gifts should be explored and used. My caution is to the married woman; her first and foremost responsibility is to God and family. Leftover energies certainly should be channeled creatively in service. I've seen too many sad examples on the field of "missionary kids" who either became bitter about Christianity because of total involvement on the part of both parents, or turned out to be utterly spoiled by their nannies (African), also the result of utter involvement of both parents. I'm speaking of adult MKs, some of whom are now on the field (or were) and other missionaries' struggles with them."

Letters

Dear Muriel, The latest edition of *Report* [focus on returned missionary women] was both informative and interesting and I want to share my copy with several women in our church. Having experienced a bit of the confusion of re-entry into American society I could sympathize (empathize) with what some of the women were saying. It has reminded me of how we need to be available to really listen. Our oldest daughter is going to be returning home after three years in Zaire with MCC.

Thank you for making me more aware of what might be helpful for her.—Clara Esch Headrick, LaJunta, CO (22 May 1980)

I am a member of the "Women Commissioned for World Mission" which began about a year ago. The purpose includes developing a network of returned missionary women, for "redefining the focus of their mission." It's comprised mostly of mainline protestant denominations' ex-missionaries, especially United Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ. There is a newsletter called *Clay Pots*, the first issue of which came out in January '80. Inquiries regarding all of this can go to Louise Palm, Stony Point Center, Stony Point, N.Y. 10980 or Eunice Poethig, 1722 E. 55th St., Chicago, IL 60615.—Connie Diller Lybarger, Trenton, NY (3 April 1980)

Dear Muriel, *The Report* stirs in me the feeling that in a very minimal way I'm part of the women's "revolution" for equality and recognition of gifts. I find it thrilling... In March I was at Hesston College to speak (share) on the topic of "Sexuality and Aging" to a class of nurses. In April I spoke to a class at Wichita State University. It all grew out of my assisting with several seminars with Dr. Mary Carmen, director of services on aging at Prairie View [Mental Health Center, Newton, Kansas] some time ago, and a workshop for nurses and others. I love it. It always gives me the feeling that I am paying my Al a tribute for so patiently teaching me so much about the wholeness of love.—Aggie Klassen, Wichita, Kansas (Not written for publication, but used with permission.)

There are times when I feel *very* cut off and then I realize that this is a tremendous opportunity to look back at my years of involvement in Mennonite institutions and make the most of the university world... There are few female (none Mennonite) role models, or mentors, in my field [Higher Education Administration], which adds to the whole insecurity feeling.—Eleanor Loewen, Bloomington, IN (17 March 1980)

Dear Muriel, I "preached" yesterday for the first time in this city. I prayed that the church people would be able to see beyond the unusualness of having me do this, and that my very simple grammar and poor pronunciation and intonation would not detract from the message. People said nice things afterwards and I think there were some genuine blessings, but I still felt too prominent. How important is the messenger?—name withheld by request

Continuing the dialogue on returned missionary women: Furloughing women over thirty-five have a crucial opportunity. Mennonite married women who went to the field in their twenties and raised families are often viewed as missionary "wife-partner" during their whole missionary (husband's) career. But in mid-life, with the children off to school, attention can be turned to specific areas in the national church to which a woman might minister. Will a woman get this kind of

encouragement on furlough? What about educational opportunities at this time? It seems to be that few national churches are going to call missionary "housewives" out of that role—the inspiration and challenge may have to come from the sending church....I recommend that mission boards have female as well as male administrators who can also minister to both partners of a missionary team and to singles, especially on furloughs.—*Mary Alene Miller, Obihiro, Hokk. 080 Japan (14 March 1980)*

I was glad to see the reference regarding Gloria Martin Eby's leadership role with the Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries [in the January-February *Report*, page 7]. While the substance of the report is correct, it would be more accurate to state that she was elected as president of the board by her fellow board members. This language, I believe, will communicate greater significance to Gloria's responsibility than the account as it appears in your report. The Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries is one of five program boards serving the Mennonite Church. The board is presently composed of four women and seven men. Gloria Martin Eby began her service on the MBCM Board in 1975. In 1977 she was elected as vice-president and in 1979 as president. Members of the board of directors are elected or appointed by the Mennonite Church General Assembly, by the Mennonite Church General Board, or by one of the five regions in the Mennonite Church. Officers of the board of directors are then elected by the board members. As executive secretary for MBCM I am directly accountable to the president of the board of directors. It seemed to me that your report did not give adequate significance

to the responsibility being carried by Gloria Martin Eby, my "boss."—*Gordon Zook, Executive Secretary, Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries, Elkhart, IN (18 April 1980)*

Looking Ahead

Forthcoming Reports will focus on:

Native American/Canadian Women. July-August 1980. Betsy Beyler, coordinator.

Developing Leadership Skills. September-October 1980. Rosie Epp, coordinator.

Women in Mennonite Business/Industry. November-December 1980. Mary Dueck, coordinator.

Women and Militarism. January-February 1981.

Mentors and Role Models for Mennonite Women. March-April 1981.

Mennonite Women Writers. May-June 1981. Elsa Redekopp, coordinator.

Are you aware of written or audio-visual resources on these topics? We would like to recommend them in *Report*. Have you (or do you know someone who has) been researching or writing on these topics, particularly as they relate to peace issues, Mennonites, or the Christian church? What actions have been taken in these areas in the community where you are living or by your church?

Send all such information to Editor, *Report*, 4830 Woodland Ave., Lincoln, NE 68516.

USPS 367-790

The *Report* is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society. Correspondence should be sent to Editor Muriel Thiessen Stackley, 4830 Woodland, Lincoln, NE 68516.

- * To subscribe send address to:
(subscription is free)
- * To change or correct your address, please send your old address with your correct address to:

MCC
21 S 12th St
Akron, PA 17501

(Allow 2-4 weeks for address change.)

MCC

Mennonite
Central
Committee

21 South 12th Street
Akron
Pennsylvania
17501
U.S.A.

Address
correction
requested

2nd Class
U.S. Postage
PAID
Akron, PA 17501